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A Model for Determining Attitudes Towards School District Reorganization

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A MODEL FOR DETERMINING ATTITUDES

TOWARDS SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION

(TITLE)

BY

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Field Experience

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It is with considerable appreciation that I acknowledge the help, support, and understanding that my wife, Dorothy, extended to me towards the successful completion of this project.

Abstract

The focus of this study is to provide a model for determining current attitudes toward school district reorganization so that a school board can gain local community data. The small rural school districts of central Illinois are finding fewer and fewer options when considering maintaining or increasing the quality of education in their communities. Illinois school reform legislation of 1985 included a section on school district reorganization which was an effort to reduce the number of districts and increase the quality of education. However, the sentiment was so strong against forced reorganization that the plan for reorganization died a political death. After a review of the literature and research, a model was developed for identifying local influential groups who were questioned on common areas of concern about reorganization. In the application of the model, influentials in Tuscola, Arcola, Atwood/Hammond, and Villa Grove school districts were surveyed for their attitudes toward reorganization. An analysis of the data collected showed the areas of concern in each of the surveyed districts, and the problems that each board must confront if reorganization is to be a viable option at some time for its district. The data collected indicated a strong concern for the welfare of the business life of the community and a desire to retain control of the local schools.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Overview of the Problem

As America moves quickly towards the close of the 1980's, schools across the country face the ever increasing task of meeting the needs of their students in an age of declining financial support and in a world that demands that students be prepared to enter new and rapidly changing technologies. Society continues to place new and more challenging demands on the students of our schools, and the everyday life of the individual becomes more and more complex. As the years have passed, the schools have become more responsible for the total student and his preparation for adult life. No longer an institution to teach only a limited curriculum, the school has been called upon to assume more of the responsibilities once reserved for the family and the church. Cultural changes, technological changes, and political changes have caused problems and challenges for both students and schools to overcome.

American culture has become increasingly open today, and topics once taboo a generation ago are now mandated parts of the curriculum in schools. Once rather bland, sex education now must delve into the cause and mechanics of AIDS. Classroom teachers explain options of birth control, and some schools experiment with in-house clinics that dispense condoms to students. While some students keep their

children born out of wedlock, others seek advice about abortion.

Once the domain of paper and pencil, schools have arrived in the electronic age. Microcomputers have appeared at all levels of our schools where first graders work electronically at simple math games and high school students study accounting and chemistry on the computer. Some schools, hard pressed to provide the pencil and paper, struggle to gather the resources to provide the electronic literacy demanded by our society. Costly vocational education programs draw suspicious glances as the once healthy Industrial Belt turns into the Rust Belt. As schools try to keep pace, the world races ahead with new technical advances.

Political changes in the nation and the world have had their impacts on education as well. America has continued to lose its economic dominance to the other industrialized nations of the world. State governors journey abroad to countries like Japan and Germany trying to lure jobs and factories to their states. American workers in American-Japanese plants are sent to Japan to learn the Japanese way. All the time American politicians sing the praises of the foreign educational systems.

Political involvement in education has also increased in recent years. In Illinois, the 1985 General Assembly passed sweeping reforms in education which were the result of

efforts by many organizations and individuals. Many changes were mandated, and one of those mandates required that committees be established to investigate the reorganization of school districts in Illinois.

However, the public sentiment to keep local schools as they were was so great in Illinois that an election year caused the politicians to back-pedal on the issue. Local passions are strong and must be investigated carefully when entering the realm of school district reorganization.

Statement of the Problem

Illinois has gone from just over 12,000 school districts in the mid 1940's to under 1,000 at the close of the 80's; however, Illinois is still dominated by small districts. Illinois has not kept pace. States around Illinois, such as Indiana, have organized their schools into larger, seemingly more efficient institutions. Many Illinois citizens readily see the desolate small towns in Indiana where a school once gave life. The school is seen as the heart of a community and no community will casually give up its school.

This is not to say that school district reorganization has not happened. As stated earlier, the number of school districts in Illinois has dropped dramatically in the past forty years. However, a great volume of this reorganization was the elimination of the one and two room schoolhouse concept of education in the post-World War II era. In 1945, with the war nearly over and men returning to their

families, the Illinois legislature, with House Bill 406, set about modernizing education (Peshkin, 1982). The one room school abounded in rural Illinois, and reorganization was mandated. Since then, Illinois has maintained a financial aid policy that rewards larger, expanding school systems (Sher & Thompkins, 1977).

Even with these changes, Illinois still has more school districts than any other state with the exception of California and Texas (Whitley, 1985). In 1985, Illinois State School Superintendent Ted Sanders increased the pressure for school district reorganization when he released two reports providing data to support the consolidation of school districts (Pipho, 1985). Sanders proposed that unit districts be no smaller than 1500 students and that high schools have an enrollment of at least 500. Sanders stated that he felt the high school students attending a school with fewer than 500 students suffered a significant loss of opportunity to learn compared to the wider variety of courses offered at larger schools (Jankowski, 1985).

In a small community, talking about school reorganization is painful. To many it is seen as a win/lose situation. In the combining of two or more small school districts, the big winner will be the community that houses the high school, although this is no plum if a new building has to be built because it is usually built somewhere on the countryside. Regardless, the difference between a winner

and a loser is whether or not a school remains in the community. All too often, a few years after a consolidation, elementary schools left open in some small communities are closed for economic reasons. The one time winners become losers. This almost natural evolution of a consolidation is known and understood by those who fear reorganization. A boarded up school building is a graphic reminder that the community is not as vital as it once was. The school is part of their past, a part of them (Peshkin, 1982).

It seems that in communities where reorganization is a possibility, those opposed to it make the most noise and get most of the media attention. This is not to say there is not support for reorganization and what it may bring. In general, the main promise of reorganization is better educational opportunity, and large schools are better able to provide the scope and quality of educational services that students need (Fitzwater, 1953). When those people who control the direction and policies of a school district begin looking at district reorganization, they need to have sound information as to the attitudes and preferences of the citizens of their district before they begin activities such as public meetings and open discussions with neighboring districts. Beginning with public meetings, without locally based research, will make many citizens believe a decision is imminent. This belief, in itself, can generate

opposition.

Based on a review of the literature and research, it appears important that decision makers contemplating school district reorganization have a firm handle on the attitudes of various segments of their community. This conclusion supports the researcher's concept that before going to open public discussion, local research to determine current community attitudes about reorganization, in selected segments of the citizenry, must be done. This will determine if reorganization is a viable option under current community political conditions. Going public too quickly may cause the issue to be lost in an uproar of opposition that does not represent the true community sentiment.

It is the purpose and goal of this field experience to develop a model specifically designed to be implemented in Tuscola School District and its most likely contiguous reorganization partners, Villa Grove, Arcola, and Atwood-Hammond school districts. It is the author's intent that this model can be used to determine community attitudes on reorganization in any rural area of a similar population.

Limitations of the Study

Although this model should be adaptable to other school districts in other areas of the State and nation, the area for which it is designed is predominately rural with light industrialization and commercial operations. Also, this model is constructed to apply to small unit districts where

many residents of one district work and shop in another district of the study. However, with some modification, the model could be used for implementation in districts of other characteristics.

The sampling will be limited to specific community groups in each community. Business people, farmers, professionals, teachers, and other individuals who are influential for political or economic reasons will be sampled. The sampling will be selective in that the most influential members of each sample group in each school district will be selected for study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in order to understand the study and its objectives:

1. Consolidation - The combining of entire districts. Any contiguous territory having an equalized assessed valuation of at least \$5,000,000 and having a citizen population of not less than 1,500 or more than 500,000 may be formed into a combined school district when the proper legal steps are followed.

2. Annexation - The attachment of a dissolved district to one or more receiving districts with the property and students divided between the districts if there are more than one receiving districts.

3. Conversion - The changing of a unit district into an elementary district (K-8) and the assignment of high school

students to a contiguous high school district.

4. Cooperative High School - The forming of a high school by two or more unit school districts. The cooperative high school would be under the joint control and support of the boards of education of the cooperating unit school districts.

5. Reorganization - The merging, changing, or dissolving of school districts into a new organizational plan through consolidation, annexation, conversion, or the creation of a cooperative high school.

Chapter II

Rationale and Review of Literature and Research

Rationale

The researcher presently holds the position of high school principal of a 300 student school in a small, rural unit district in East Central Illinois. The student population consists primarily of middle and lower middle class students who, on average, perform consistently at the sixty-fifth to seventieth percentile on nationally normed achievement tests.

The district is also located in a rural county with a population of just under 20,000. Three contiguous districts of similar characteristics are located within the same county. Within the past two years, three of the four districts have discussed methods of enhancing their programs through shared classes and possible reorganization. However, in all cases, the discussion has never gone beyond initial perfunctory talks by the boards of education.

Since approximately sixty to sixty-five percent of the students in the researcher's school, Tuscola High School, continue their education beyond high school by attending a university, junior college, or vocational school, the educational design in the system has pursued a path of preparing students for this outcome. With diminishing financial support and declining enrollment, options for

maintaining the current standards of curricular offerings must be examined. One method of maintaining and even enhancing current programs in Tuscola and the three contiguous districts of Arcola, Atwood-Hammond, and Villa Grove is through reorganization.

During the period of dialogue by the boards of education, the researcher observed very little commitment by any of the boards. This lack of commitment may have stemmed from the fact that none of the boards knew the true attitudes of their communities toward reorganization. It is the goal of this researcher to develop, through a review of literature and research, a model for determining the attitudes of the community towards reorganization.

Political history has shown that when governing bodies contemplate significant changes, they move with firm commitment when they have a sound reading on the political position of their constituents. Through the development of the model, it is felt that similar districts will be able to gain local data for use by policymakers when considering significant changes such as reorganization.

Review of the Literature

Background

We are a nation of small school districts. Data from the Center for Education Statistics (1980-81) show that 69% of school districts in the country have four or fewer schools, with an average enrollment of 325 pupils per

school.

Illinois is a state of small school districts. Of the other 49 states, only Nebraska has more small districts than Illinois (Ferderer, 1982). In Illinois, in 1983-84, 180 districts (18% of the total) had fewer than 200 enrolled students, and there were 350 high schools (48% of all the high schools in the state) with less than 400 students (Whitley, 1985). Legislators, educators, taxpayers, and politicians are not comfortable with numbers like these.

A review of the literature shows that, for nearly a century, educators have targeted small, rural schools for elimination. Plans, resolutions, and more recently, mandates have attempted to restructure, rearrange, or replace entirely those schools deemed inadequate by virtue of their size. One can go back to Horace Mann, who, as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, first urged centralization and state control of the haphazard school organization that existed (Sher, 1977).

Even one hundred years ago, the debate polarized between those urging a centralized, state controlled, homogeneous education, and those supporting more broad-based local control (Morphet, Roe, & Reller, 1959). Reorganization and centralization were promoted by educators nationwide, without regard or reference to local conditions and concerns (Sher, 1977). Many rural schools needed improvement because materials and facilities were grossly inadequate, teachers

untrained, and the communities were unable to make improvements.

By the 1890's the ethic equating quantity and growth with progress had become deeply imbedded in the American consciousness. Although rural life styles continued to be cherished, the values and standards of urban life became dominant throughout America (Sher, 1977). In 1895, the National Education Association established the Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools. In its final report, "the committee urgently pressed for administrative consolidation, and attributed any opposition to the power of conservative habit, a fondness for office-holding, and misconceptions and ignorance of the merits of consolidation" (National Education Association, 1897).

By the end of World War I, centralization was well established among leading administrators and reformers nationwide as the proper policy direction. However, among many rural educators and their taxpayers at the local level, there remained considerable doubt (Sher, 1977). Many educators supporting the reorganization movement had only the best intentions. Their goal, to upgrade rural education, was commendable. They wanted, for the rural areas, what children in city schools had. They wanted, for rural schools, the same materials, resources, and curriculum available in city schools. As the literature shows, however, these good intentions, when thrust upon the rural

areas, did not take into account what was already there.

Some educators, clearly the minority, recognized that one could not impose city standards in rural areas and expect the same results. By discounting the value of the organization already in place in rural areas, some reforms were doomed to failure, or, as will be seen, never-ending opposition. In 1939, the American Association of School Administrators stated:

Keep the schools and the government of the schools close to the people, so that the citizens generally, including parents and taxpayers, may know what their schools are doing, and may have an effective voice in the school program...the relationship of the school to the natural community and the closeness of the school to the people are of first-rate educational significance and are not to be sacrificed in the interests of efficiency. If such a sacrifice is made to establish economical districts, we will find in a generation that something of deep significance which money cannot buy has been destroyed. ("Schools in Small Communities," 1939, p. 29)

With the end of World War II, school reorganization took on a renewed, almost frenzied pace. The issues involved in this push were summarized by Sher (1977). "Efficiency, economy, and equity in the distribution of the tax burden all require a reorganization of the structure of school

district organization and local school administration in a very large part of rural America" (p. 38).

At this time, one room school districts abounded in every rural area of the country though they were much improved from their predecessors. However, reform proponents zeroed in on size as the primary factor that kept rural education from conforming to urban education. Yet, population sparsity and geographic isolation made the creation of urban sized schools inconceivable in many sections of rural America. The solution was seen as district reorganization (Sher, 1977). Improved roads and school buses, while precluding urban sized schools, lent themselves to the forming of much larger, and therefore more acceptable, school districts. Only the most rural states, such as Vermont, Nebraska, and Montana, managed to retain their small districts in the face of consolidation and reorganization (Sher, 1977).

Illinois is an excellent example of what happened to bring about massive reorganization. In 1945, Illinois had approximately 12,000 school districts. With House Bill 406 (the Illinois School Survey Act) as the impetus, the number of school districts was slashed to just over 2,000 by 1955 (Peshkin, 1982). This was an incredible feat, and it mirrored the nationwide trend. In 1950, there were 83,718 districts in America. By 1960, that number was halved to 40,500. And it was halved again during the following

decade, so that by 1970 only 17,995 school districts remained nationwide (Peshkin, 1982).

But what was accomplished never seemed to be enough. It seemed that size is what dictated success. Therefore, size was the focal point. In 1959, three of the nations leading educators insisted that, "At least 85% of the school districts found throughout the United States are too small to provide an effective program of education at any cost" (Morphet, Johns, & Reller, 1959, p. 226).

As more recent literature shows, size is still a primary issue. The economy and equality that Sher presents are also central to reorganization, but for some reason size is where the examination begins, and often ends. In the 1980's, the one room school in Illinois is a thing of the past. We now have just under 1,000 school districts, down from over 12,000 in the 1940's. But we still have more than any other state except California and Texas (Whitley, 1985).

Illinois School Superintendent Ted Sanders set off a new round of pressure for reorganization in 1985 with the issuance of two reports: "School District Organization in Illinois" and "Student Achievement in Illinois: An Analysis of Student Progress." Both reports were aimed at providing data to support the consolidation of school districts (Pipho, 1985). In support of the State Board, the Illinois Legislature included a section on school district reorganization in SB 730 (Pipho, 1985). Citing achievement

test scores (particularly in math, geometry, and reading), Sanders stated, "...the evidence shows that students attending high schools with small enrollments suffer a significant loss of opportunity to learn from advanced courses that are offered in larger schools" (Pipho, 1985, p. 182). Sanders felt the reorganization plan would discourage maintenance of small or rural districts (Jankowski, 1985). SB 730, which became law, was quite specific in the numbers of students to be considered a minimum in the new districts. Unit districts were to have no fewer than 1500 students, and high schools should have at least 500 students (Jankowski, 1985).

Reorganization committees from each of the State's 57 educational service regions were to report by June 30, 1986, with some kind of plan for meeting the numbers given above (Pipho, 1985). After a year of heated protest and legislative backpedalling, however, the legislators themselves took the teeth out of the reorganization plan (Dowling, 1986). For numerous reasons, however, the inquiries and challenges begun by Sanders continue for struggling rural school districts which face ever-declining enrollment and tax bases.

Power structures

One can see from Illinois' history that when all else fails, politicians and legislatures can get done what reasons, studies, and results of surveys cannot. In any

discussion of educational issues, politics cannot be ignored. Webster's Dictionary (1980) defines politics as, "of or concerned with government, the state, or politics." Its secondary meaning is, "having a definite governmental organization" (p. 1103). It is with this second meaning in mind that one can view the school district and the community within which it operates.

Schools cannot escape politics or being political. "Schools are creatures of the state and are supported by tax monies. They are therefore political whatever the ideology may say. And not infrequently, schools find themselves the object of great political, if not partisan, pressure from concerned groups of local citizens or from local chapters of national pressure groups" (Gehlen, 1969, p. 1).

The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution reserves the responsibility for education to the states. States fulfill that responsibility by mandating such things as certification of teachers, minimum standards in buildings and curriculum, school calendar, definition of school day, and other requirements. But the day-to-day operation of the school is delegated by state law to locally selected boards of education. These boards in turn make general policy, but they leave the decision making for operational procedures to the superintendent (Gehlen, 1969).

A review of the literature shows several studies which view the "power structure" of a community and its effects on

the decisions made by local school boards and superintendents. Gehlen (1969) points out three ways that school boards are influenced in general by taxpayers. The first and most obvious way is through school board elections. The second way is through individuals voicing their dissatisfaction by such means as letters to the editor or addressing the board in open session. The third way is through organized group pressure. Some examples of this, and just how crippling they can prove to be, can be seen in studies of the history of districts attempting to reorganize. Peshkin (1982) describes a group, Kilmer Concerned Citizens, who petitioned its educational service region board for the right to secede from its own district when that district voted to close the school in Kilmer and build another one in another town. That secession fight not only stalled for years the district's ability to build the new school, but it clearly polarized the citizens of five towns and bitterly divided them.

In a document outlining the formation of Olympia School District in Illinois, it was noted that five taxpayers battled the newly formed district all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The two years of litigation was costly to the district not so much in terms of legal fees, but more in terms of inflation and loss of special funding. The total estimated cost of the delay: \$2,504,000 ("Educational Opportunities," 1973).

These are specific examples which show the ramifications of organized opposition to school boards and their decisions. It is therefore useful for superintendents to be aware of influentials and to anticipate the reactions of these groups to the decisions made. Both Gehlen (1969) and Rada (1984) suggest these influentials form the underlying power structure of a community. They are: (1) individual school board members; (2) teachers; (3) taxpayer associations; (4) city councils; (5) business and commercial people; and (6) individuals influential for economic or political reasons.

Validity for these groupings can be found in other studies, particularly the last grouping. William D'Antonio (1961) in his "Institutional and Occupational Representations in Eleven Community Influence Systems" found that the sector that provided the largest number of top influentials was business. Another important finding: "Apparently size of city is not related to the proportion of business people found among the top influentials of the community" (p. 442). Newman and Bull (1986) also found businesspeople to be of high influence when decisions are to be made concerning public policy, especially school policy.

The superintendent, as delegated by the board of education, and as the representative of the state in education matters, is indeed a powerful figure in the community. On the one hand, the superintendent can and does

exert an enormous amount of power when it come to shaping the general policy as well as specific daily procedures in schools. On the other hand, the superintendent must co-exist with the other recognized power groups in the community. The superintendent must also be aware of the need to call upon any or all of those groups to support the educational policies the superintendent puts forth (Kirst, 1983).

Every superintendent knows that he cannot count on support from the influentials of the community at all times. There are many other things a superintendent can do within the community power structure that will give him a degree of power. Being in control of an issue is certainly an asset. One way a superintendent can control an issue is to control when an issue is raised. A superintendent will be aware of a general atmosphere/attitude among the various groups, and when schools seem in generally good favor, a rather controversial issue can be raised (Gehlen, 1969; Wirt, 1983).

Another way to control an issue is to choose the manner in which the issue is defined. As Gehlen (1969) points out:

The person first initiating action on given proposal can often determine the scope of the problem. In addition, school personnel are generally the 'experts' on educational issues, and their expertise itself is a resource which allows them to exert a great deal of

influence on the final outcome. To the extent that the controversial issues are rationally discussed, they bring the resource of their own knowledge and the ability of their staff to gather and disseminate relevant materials. These are factors of no small importance. (p. 10)

Because a superintendent must continually be prepared for conflict in dealing with the various groups within the power structure of the community, Gehlen (1969) suggests this definition of power for a superintendent who wishes to remain in control: "Rather than viewing power as the ability to make administrative decisions, it may be viewed as the ability to prevail in open conflict when a particular issue is at stake (p. 11).

There is nothing more divisive for a school district and school community than discussions of reorganization. Goldhammer (1965) found five categories of factors that he relates to public acceptance of change in education. One is the image the public holds of the person advocating the change. Goldhammer suggests that, "to gain the confidence and respect of the community, the superintendent must be accepted both as an authority on education and as an adherent to the stable values and goals of the community" (p. 5). Second, Goldhammer notes that the public's image of the organization and the ends that organization serves will affect the public's acceptance of change within it. Third

is the public's view of the proposed change itself: "The vaguer, the less specific, the less direct the advantages and significance of the innovations to the citizens, the less likely they will be to favor the proposed changes" (p. 9-10). Fourth is the congruence of the proposed change with generally accepted values and recognized social needs. Finally, there are unique situational factors which facilitate or impede the acceptance. Goldhammer's opinion is that the smaller and more tradition-bound a community is, the more resistant to change it tends to be.

With all these factors of public acceptance of change, it is even more critical to be able to turn with confidence to the informal power structure which could be most influential should it choose to act (Ziegler, Kehoe, Reisman, & Polito, 1981). Gehlen (1969) has found that, "the actual exercise of power is seen to be limited to a very small percentage of the population. A survey of the literature found no study in which more than three per cent of the adult population actively participated in the decision making process of the community" (p. 6). Additionally, Kimbrough (1964) found that, "Decisive power is exercised in most local school districts by relatively few persons who hold top positions of influence in the informal power structure of the community. The success of significant educational projects and proposals is often heavily dependent upon the support or lack of support of

these people of power" (p. 200).

School size

A review of the literature shows that just talking about reorganization is painful for many communities. Actually doing it is unthinkable for some, inevitable for others. The issues and emotions raised can best be summarized by the two questions Beverly Scobell (1985) asked in her summary of the Illiopolis struggle: "Can the small school survive? Should the small school survive?" (p. 24).

So much in the reorganization debate is difficult to measure. While the state issues optimum numbers and hints at possible boundaries, rural and small town citizens are clinging to intangibles that do not show up on charts or achievement test results. But in the process of reorganization, these intangibles cannot be ignored. They must be recognized and dealt with on the local level if the reorganization process is to be completed without tearing out the soul of a community and taking the citizens' cooperation with it.

John Holt posits: "We do not need enormous centralized schools in order to have quality education. This is the reverse of what we have been told and sold. All over the country, we have destroyed small schools. In their place we have built giant factories which we run, for the most part, like armies and prisons because they seem too big to be run like anything else" (Gordon, 1946, p. xiv).

Jonathan Sher (1977) charges that research on small schools seems to be devoted to proving that they have defects; the emphasis is on the disadvantages while ignoring the strengths, and the areas of possible growth. In trying to better rural schools, "...leaders thought they were rescuing rural schools by eliminating their uniquely rural character and heritage. As a result, their policies were directed not toward creating better rural schools, but rather toward a wholesale urbanization of such schools" (p. 272).

Sher's comments notwithstanding, there is literature which explores what is right about small schools, and rural education. Alan Peshkin's two works, Growing Up American (1978) and An Imperfect Union (1982), are microscopic inspections of small schools in rural areas. These works show small schools' strengths, weaknesses, and problems and their attitudes toward those problems. Peshkin (1978) found that the intimacy of a small community grows out of a simple, fundamental fact---knowing and being known. In a small town, a greeting is a commonplace act; your presence is taken account of; you do not go unobserved. Gehlen (1969) found the school in a small community to be, "...one of the few, if not the [only] organization, that has widespread contact within the community and with which most of the community members identify. It functions as a symbol of community enterprise and pride. There is often no other

organization like the school athletic team or the school band that represents the community as a community in any kind of contact with others" (p. 27).

Peshkin (1982) saw the school building as being part of the community landscape; it belongs to the normal order of things. A school building in a small town is a sign of well-being. If the building is vital, vibrant, and kept up, it signals the same for the town. If it is boarded up and abandoned, it speaks clearly of the condition of the town's spirit. Dunne (1977) found that the traditional rural school is, above all, an extension of its community. The school's identity is sometimes so intertwined with the community as to be virtually indistinguishable from it. There are values quite evident in a small town, and therefore in their schools, that one will not find in any large organization, school, city, or other body.

Both Peshkin and Gehlen find in the rural areas, "outposts of traditional American values, places that hold fast to the old virtues of God, country, and self-reliance" (Peshkin, 1978, p. 29). Gehlen (1969) finds that people who live in small towns often choose to live in small towns as much for its lifestyle and set of values as for any other reason. Dunne (1977) found that strengths of small schools stemmed partly from size and partly from their place in the rural community.

It seems with so many issues in the reorganization

discussion, so much comes back to size. Rural schools, for the most part, do not apologize for their size; in fact, they take pride in their smallness. The residents of a small community take comfort in the fact that teachers and administrators know all the students by sight, and are on a first name basis with most of the students' parents. There are other benefits to small size. Dunne (1977) found that small classes (more common in small schools) focus more on positive capabilities of the child, judging the work according to individual criteria rather than some mass measure. Dunne (1977) also found that, "In large schools, the most talented may thrive on competition, but the great majority of students are obviously and inherently left out or left behind" (p. 97).

Barker and Gump (1964) in Big School, Small School report several significant and important findings relevant to the question of the quality of the school experience in small schools versus larger, consolidated schools. To summarize their findings: "The actual proportion of students who can participate in the essential activities that support the academic program, the quality of that involvement, and the satisfaction with the involvement clearly favor the smaller community school over the larger, consolidated school" (p. 196). As an example of their findings: "The proportion of students who participated in district music festivals, and dramatic, journalistic and

student government competitions reach a peak in schools with enrollment between 61 and 150. The proportion of participants was 3 to 20 times as great in the small schools as in the largest schools. The number of extra-curricular activities and kinds of activities engaged in during their four years high school careers was twice as great in the small schools as in the large schools" (p. 196).

Barker and Gump (1964) found that participation in classes followed the same pattern as extra-curricular participation. They state, "Although more school classes and more varieties of classes were available to them, the large school students participated in fewer classes and in fewer varieties than the small school students" (p. 169). Barker and Gump (1964) concluded that not only is the actual proportion of children who participate diminished in larger schools, but the large school is dominated by a small handful of students.

Perhaps proponents of reorganization need to recognize what exists, and keep what is of value, before rearranging small schools, and thus destroying part of its nature. From the perspective of a student from a small school, he viewed his education as, "...a community event," when, "...everybody is into what every body else is doing" (Rosenfeld, 1977, p. 264).

Finally, what needs to be pointed out is what rural schools do not have that larger schools, for the most part,

do. Summing up Illiopolis High School prior to a consolidation vote, Scobell (1985) noted: "There is no drop-out rate; there is no truancy; the last disciplinary expulsion was 8 years ago; there is no fighting in the hallways. There is no racial or religious strife because there are no minorities or religions other than Christianity. Drugs cannot be said to be a major problem" (p. 25).

Attitudes

The attitudes of various community groups toward reorganization will be examined in light of the general issues of economy, efficiency, and equality of opportunity.

The economic issues of reorganization can be oversimplified by the phrase "economy of scale"---the reduction of unit cost as size increases. This is actually what proponents of reorganization advertised would happen and fully expected to happen. States no longer claim that reorganization will reduce costs. Instead, they argue that taxpayers will get more for their money (Rosenfeld, 1977). Proponents of reorganization now argue on the logic that larger schools are more effective. Dunne (1977) agrees with Rosenfeld that reorganization does not necessarily save money. Cost, for many educators, is used purely in the fiscal sense, but that is not the only sense in which the word is used. Cost can also mean the cost to the student of lost opportunity.

Consider this quote from the Massachusetts Board of Education: "While it is clear that it costs more to educate secondary students in regional school districts, it is also obvious that, when compared with programs and services offered in small high schools: (1) a much broader program is available in the regional schools; (2) services of guidance counselors and librarians are more often available; (3) the academic status of teachers is higher; (4) teachers have fewer different preparations; and (5) more qualified teachers are attracted to regional high schools than to small high schools" (Dunne, 1977, p. 85). The question which must be answered in communities considering reorganization is whether these benefits to high school children are worth the extra cost. To rural parents, a full-time librarian might not be worth a two hour daily bus ride, and teachers with master's degrees may not be worth the sacrifice of ready contact with every member of the school board (Dunne, 1977).

Peshkin (1978) found the price paid for an education in small town schools to be very high. His research showed that, "In other larger school districts parents, students, and teachers place more emphasis on academic achievement and press for more resources to be directed toward intellectual goals. Consequently, some children are better taught math and science, and are better informed" (p. 199).

One aspect of cost not yet covered is the one seen

through the eyes of the business people, the farmers, and others influential for economic reasons. Their school may be very dear to them, but how much are they willing to pay to keep their school. Financially strapped farmers and business owners located on a dying Main Street may not be able to afford the price tag that goes with keeping a school in town. However, if they let it go, they face the prospect of a dead town without a school. Vidich (1958) found, "Businessmen are generally interested in two things: the maintenance of law and order for the protection of property, and the effects of school policy on the level of local business" (p. 181). School board members who are also farmers have a tendency to be "academic rationalists" (Peshkin, 1982) when it comes to spending tax dollars. Of farmers, Vidich (1958) also found, "...farmers have tended to dominate town government less by occupying its formal positions than by acting successfully as a pressure group" (p. 150). Some business people are accused of being more interested in their own personal losses than that of the community. As one board member pointed out, "People say about this consolidation business that what's really at the bottom of it is financial interest---people afraid of losing their business community and not thinking about the education of their children" (Peshkin, 1982, p. 136). Put another way by a parent, "Is it more important that the children have a piece of property that later down the road

is worth a few more dollars because there is a school in town or that the children have a quality education to get through life with?" (Brown, 1985, p. 2).

To sum up the concept of cost, some may resist change, but not if the price is too high. From one parent, "If it takes consolidation to get a better education, then I say let's do it. I'd like to have a school in town, but not if the price is a poorer education" (Peshkin, 1982, p. 173). For others, however, almost any price paid to send students to a larger school in a larger community is excessive. They fear the loss of intimacy and control (Peshkin, 1982). All parties involved in considering reorganization must deal with these real fears, these real losses.

Efficiency in education is an elusive and nebulous quality. Proponents of reorganization argue that combining small, scattered, inefficient units into larger, more tightly managed units is the best way to serve the students, as well as to be responsible to the taxpayer. Whitley (1985) discusses the impact of reorganization on the taxpayers at length.

Just as American business has realized that it cannot afford to operate inefficient facilities in tough economic times, so too must taxpayers recognize that inefficient school systems are a luxury many of them can no longer afford. Yet citizens who keep a critical eye on government spending at state and national levels

are often blind to the hard realities in their own communities. (p. 53)

Whitley cautions, however, that the taxpayer should not count on reorganization to always result in lower taxes. "What reorganization really offers taxpayers is the opportunity to get more for their tax dollars through increased efficiency, lower cost per student, and expanded course offerings" (p. 53).

Equality of opportunity in education is accepted as a right in the United States. One change for the better that is promised by proponents of reorganization is better educational opportunities. Fitzwater (1953) studied 552 districts nationwide which consolidated after post World War II reorganization mandates. He states: "Some very small schools are excellent. But it is generally agreed that those of larger size are better able to provide the scope and quality of educational services that pupils of today need" (p. 3). He warns, however, that, "The establishment of a larger school does not constitute an iron-clad guarantee that this will happen; it can only help set the conditions" (p. 3). Perusal of the literature indicates this is all the pro-consolidators are asking for. They promise, in consolidation, changes for the better. They see in consolidation opportunities for their children they cannot now have. The pro-consolidators envision that larger schools will produce both cost reductions and a place of

welcome changes where their children can meet a greater variety of other children, where teachers concentrate on teaching subjects in which they have been specially trained, where greater numbers of students facilitate grouping students for enhanced instruction, and where higher levels of academic expectation help prepare children to succeed in a competitive world" (Peshkin, 1982, p. 172).

It is an accepted fact by all involved in the reorganization controversy that larger schools have more to offer. Whitley (1985) points out that disparity exists in the amount of financial support available to students, depending upon the size and location of their district. State Superintendent Sanders agrees. He states, "There are already too many inequalities in education, and with limited resources schools are funded inefficiently" (Jankowski, 1985, p. 7). Many small schools pride themselves on being able to offer adequate programs, but when funding is cut, or tax assessments devalue, even that adequacy is threatened. In describing Illiopolis schools contemplating consolidation, Scobell (1985) states: "It does still work and has quality parts, but only occasionally do all the gears mesh to achieve the full potential of the design" (p. 24).

There is always a return to community, and its importance in one's education. Rosenfeld's findings conclude: "Equality of access to educational resources may

be improved through standardization, but true equality of opportunity is still a function of class background and environmental factors. Most research has shown that equal access to resources does very little to equalize outcomes. Removing the parents and the community from the process ignores the evidence that shows the importance of family and peer groups to achievement" (p. 267). Sher (1977) finds that, "Rural schools remain essentially an expression of community life" (p. 9). Even George Will (1988), covering the Iowa caucuses, commented, "In Iowa's small towns, as in much of the Midwest, the center of cultural life is the high school" (p. 64).

But the issue of size will remain one that cannot easily be countered. Peshkin (1978), who examined several small schools districts in great detail, made this comment about one: "If Mansfield's children lack educational opportunities equal to those available in larger cities, they are not denied these opportunities by virtue of race or national origin, but by virtues of Mansfield's size and prevailing ethos, which establish the limits of excellence" (p. 200).

In the end, perhaps it is best to recognize that there is no one answer, or one solution for all. Looking at what already exists is the first step. Perhaps direction can be found in Dunne's (1977) statement: "Successful rural school improvement will begin with the community as a resource, not

as a barrier to be overcome or a difficult client to be won over" (p. 114).

Research Review

A review of the research on school reorganization provides similar kinds of information found in the literature. The issue of size is well researched, but attitudes toward reorganization are not. What is available is well done, but there is much about attitudes which remains unknown.

The Small Schools Project of the National Rural Center (Carlsen & Dunne, 1981), funded by the National Institute of Education, is a look at the nation's small rural schools, their strengths and weaknesses, their resources and potentials. The study was based on survey data gleaned from a group of teachers, principals, and school board members in small rural schools. A random sample of school people was sent questionnaires designed to gather basic statistics, general information, and attitudinal data on small schools.

There were five major issues addressed: (1) changing enrollment; (2) school consolidation; (3) educational resources; (4) vocational education; and (5) special education. After their findings on each issue were presented, some suggestions for dealing with the problems were offered. For example, after listing the percentages of perceived advantages and disadvantages of consolidation, the author suggested: "Small rural communities seem often to be

intent on retaining their schools, even in the face of pressure, even in the face of apparent financial advantage. The reason for this commitment warrants far more exploration if policymakers are to make wise and balanced decisions about reorganizing the remaining schools in small rural communities" (Carlsen & Dunne, 1981, p. 303).

"Educational Opportunities of Rural School Consolidation" (1973), funded by the Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education, is a study of the consolidation of five school districts into one. Information was collected from community residents on employment, specific occupation, school enrollment, and the highest educational level achieved. A public opinion survey was taken on citizens' opinions about the schools. Also a student interest inventory was administered to 10th graders.

The public opinion survey was distributed to adult members of households in newly formed Olympia School District with responses chosen from a Likert scale. A sample question: "How did you feel about the Olympia consolidation issue at the time it was being considered?" (Educational Opportunities, 1973, p. 30). The questionnaire yielded a 34.4% response overall.

The Student Interest Inventory was administered to 9th graders in the spring of 1972, prior to consolidation. The same instrument, with few modifications, was administered to selected members of the same group the following spring

after consolidation. There is no summary or conclusions section, but there are comments and comparisons concerning each question asked. A study of these comparisons again illustrates that perceptions and fears prior to consolidation are not what actually happened after consolidation. For example, in response to the question: "In Olympia High School, getting to know my teacher will be easy," the positive response nearly doubled after the consolidation. This trend is indicative of responses to almost all the questions.

In The Effects of Closing a High School on Parent Attitudes, Student Attitudes, and Student Achievement (1986), Howard Ebmeier found that there had been little systematic examination of the effects of closing a high school on community attitudes, particularly parent and student attitudes. Ebmeier (1986) noted that the lack of data was so profound that in a recent court attempt to block the closing of a high school, Committee of Ten vs Community Unit School District 200 in 1984, expert witnesses had to rely on subjective evidence, data from the closing of elementary buildings, and personal estimates to predict the effects of closing a high school.

Ebmeier undertook three separate studies measuring student attitudes, parent attitudes, and student achievement surrounding the closing of a high school. He used a mixture of closed-ended questions, multiple choice responses, and

open-ended questions requiring a written response. Ebmeier found evidence of stability of student achievement. He also found a lower participation ratio in extra-curricular activities which may be due to transportation difficulties. However, he also found that with consolidation there is a decrease in the total number of available slots for student participation in many activities.

Ebmeier found that questions related to school closing were negative. But for questions of a personal nature, the students seemed unaffected by the school closing. He concluded that if there had been less turmoil surrounding the school closure, the strength of the negative responses would have been reduced. Ebmeier also noted that, given the strong bond between an individual student and a particular school, it is not surprising that the students felt the effects.

The final area is parent attitudes. Ebmeier found that parents of students who were transferred reported significantly more negative feelings in almost all categories of questions in contrast to parents of non-transfer students. He also illustrated how parents' perception was very often different from the reality. For example, when asked about grades being affected by the transfer, the parents felt that their children were receiving lower marks when in fact their grades were the same or slightly higher than the previous year. Ebmeier

concluded that this illustrates the potentially damaging effect of negative publicity.

Ebmeier summarizes: "It appears that school closures have little effect on student achievement or internal personality characteristics. The extent people believe school closures have had a damaging effect on the school community as a whole is, however, another matter. The more difficult and divisive the school closure appears to have been, the more negative the overall responses" (p. 30).

A report by the National School Board Association, The People Look at Their School Boards (1975), is a study to discover people's attitudes toward their school boards and their schools. As stated in the introduction: "An awareness of how the public perceives school boards and their legal responsibilities is important to board members when considering their responses to, or resistance to the public's pressures" (p. 1). The study found that school districts in relatively small and mid-sized communities tend to rate better than school districts in larger areas. This corresponds with the relatively high esteem accorded school boards in smaller communities. Judgements of how well school boards represent the public are more favorable in smaller communities, also. It was found that residents in small communities are more likely to have an opinion about their schools. The study found that business and farm households are more likely to vote in school board

elections. In general, knowledge, support, and involvement with local schools and school boards increase as the size of the community decreases.

An Educational Research Service Brief, Summary of Research on Size of Schools and School Districts (1974) asks at the beginning of its study: "Is bigger better? Do good things come in small packages?" (p. 1). In this study of school size, the conclusion was reached that, "size is not absolute; it is but one of many factors related to educational quality" (p. 49). The report continues: "Schools and school districts that are small can achieve quality in educational programs but only if sufficient funds are available and are properly spent to compensate for the diseconomies of smallness" (p. 50).

Uniqueness of the Study

From a review of the literature and research on community attitudes toward reorganization, it is evident that there is a need for a plan by which to gain local research for a board of education or administration that is considering all viable options in providing the best quality education for their students. When exploring options, boards of education cannot turn away from all possibilities solely because an open discussion may create turmoil in their district. Through low-profile testing of the waters of influentials in the community, the board could gain insight as to whether or not reorganization is a path to

pursue. In this regard, the researcher feels that the study can make a contribution to education.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

General Design of the Study

This study is designed in three parts. The first is the identification and selection of influentials within the communities of the study. The second is the development of the survey to be used in determining the attitudes of the influentials toward school district reorganization. Finally, the data collected will be analyzed to determine the attitudes of the influentials toward reorganization.

To prepare for this study, the researcher reviewed the literature and research on school district reorganization. Emphasis in the review was placed on the background of reorganization, national and state policies toward reorganization, local power structures and the decision making process, and attitudes toward school size.

Key groups of influentials in communities were identified through the review of the literature and research. Within the studied communities, members of these groups will be selectively chosen for study due to their leadership and influence upon their groups.

The survey instrument was developed to gain the attitudes of the influentials towards items of concern normally generated by reorganization discussions in a community. The items of concern are based upon the literature and research of reorganization.

From the developed instrument, the current attitudes toward reorganization in the studied school districts are to be determined. This locally developed research should aid the school districts being studied to determine viable options in discussions of reorganization. The data gathered is analyzed descriptively by group in Chapter IV.

Sample and Population

This study includes the unit school districts of Tuscola, Atwood/Hammond, Villa Grove, and Arcola. These districts are located in Douglas County with the exception of Atwood/Hammond where the attendance centers are located just out of Douglas County and in Piatt County. The area of the study is predominantly rural in nature. Douglas County has a population of just under 20,000, and Piatt County is similar.

The four school districts of the study are small with none exceeding 1,000 in enrollment. Enrollment as of October 1, 1987, in Tuscola is 965, in Arcola is 779, in Atwood/Hammond is 550, and in Villa Grove is 899. In all districts, the primary tax support of education comes from the farmland tax base, although, both Tuscola and Arcola have significant commercial tax bases.

From a review of the literature and research, five groups were identified for study. Businesspeople, farmers, professionals, teachers, and those influential because of political or economic reasons will be studied. For the

purpose of this study, city council members, as identified in the literature, will be combined with those influential for political reason. From these groups in each community, ten influential members of each group will be identified and administered the survey instrument.

The individuals to be surveyed will be chosen selectively for their influence upon their groups. Superintendents of the studied districts will be interviewed along with board members to aid in identifying the ten most influential individuals in each group. The superintendents and board members will be used because of their close interaction with the politics of education in their respective communities, and their knowledge of the power structure in their district. The literature and research has shown that superintendents are best situated to interpret the political ebb and flow of leadership in their communities (Wirt, 1983).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Collection

The survey instrument was mailed to the selected influentials in each community. A cover letter accompanied the survey along with a letter from the superintendent of the influentials' home school district. This letter was designed to minimize any concern or uncertainty that the respondents may have about contributing to this study. The superintendents' letters explained the intent and purpose of

the study. It also served to open the door of the community to the researcher. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included for easy return of the survey to the researcher.

Before mailing, the surveys were coded for easy identification. From the coding, the respondent's school district, group, and identity will be determined upon return of the survey. With this information, the researcher can follow up on unreturned surveys in order to gain a high rate of return.

Instrumentation

The survey contained ten statements, each statement reflecting a particular attitude or concern about school district reorganization. The respondent was asked to mark a letter under each statement that corresponds with their opinion to the statement. SA was circled for strongly agree, A for agree, U for undecided, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree.

Statement 1: It is only a matter of time before our school district will combine with another school district in some sort of reorganization.

This statement addresses the feeling of inevitability of reorganization. When people feel something is inevitable, such as reorganization, their attitude towards the change can be one of resignation (Peshkin, 1982). It is important to know to what degree the influentials in a community feel reorganization is likely to happen in the projectable

future.

Statement 2: The school districts in our immediate area are quite similar and comparable.

This statement focuses on the rapport between the school communities in the surrounding area. People often oppose reorganization because they feel that the schools they might combine with are inferior to their own schools (Peshkin, 1978). If this attitude is minimal, a decision to reorganize would not have this obstacle to overcome. If this attitude is dominant, work needs to be done to demonstrate the qualities of the schools in the area.

Statement 3: The reorganization of my school district into a somewhat larger district would improve educational opportunity for our students.

Improved educational opportunities is the sought objective in school reorganization today (Carlsen & Dunne, 1981). Without a general attitude that opportunities would be expanded for students by reorganization, reorganization would be a difficult item to sell to a community.

Statement 4: We would get more for our money if we combined with another district or districts.

Although proponents of reorganization do not claim money is saved through reorganization, they do claim that money is better spent in larger districts versus smaller districts (Dunne, 1977). It is important to know if the influentials feel that tax dollars would be better spent with somewhat

larger districts. If so, this would be a pivotal argument in the decision.

Statement 5: If the choice were between raising taxes and reorganization, I would support reorganization if we kept local control of our elementary school (K-8) but combined our high school with a neighboring high school or high schools.

A major stumbling block to reorganization has traditionally been the loss of control of local elementary schools (Gehlen, 1969). With the advent of customized reorganization plans in other areas of the State, such as the conversion method, boards need to know the current attitude towards keeping the elementary school but losing the high school. If a strong positive attitude is there, variations to the conversion methods are possible through further customizing of reorganization plans.

Statement 6: If the choice were between raising taxes to keep our school and consolidation, I would support the reorganization of our entire district with another district or districts.

Consolidation is the most common and talked about form of reorganization. However, it is also the form of reorganization that causes the greatest change for the community, especially if that community does not retain a school (Peshkin, 1982). The influentials' attitude towards this option will establish to what degree significant change

through reorganization will be supported.

Statement 7: If through reorganization our community did not retain a school, the loss of the school would not do significant harm to our local businesses.

Although local businesspeople would be most concerned about this, all groups would have an opinion. It is generally held by people that property values, quality of life, and business income are affected by reorganization of schools. It is important to learn to what degree this attitude exists in each community being studied. If this attitude is present to a great degree, reorganization will be difficult to achieve without detailed planning for this concern of the public (Ziegler, 1981).

Statement 8: Our town would gain as much benefit and a wider known identity from a consolidated school system than it presently gets from our smaller school system.

Some communities feel that their towns would lose their identity if they lose the school which bears the towns' names. However, some communities feel that a larger, more competitive system would gain a new, more positive image for their area (Goldhammer, 1965). With data on this attitude, a board of education can plan on the best way to present the option of reorganization to the community.

Statement 9: If reorganization were seen as the best option for our school district by the board of education, some would oppose it, but most would listen to the reasons

and make the best choice for the education of our students.

With this statement, data will be gathered as to the influentials' reading of the political realities of the their community. Often a vocal minority will voice opposition and forestall discussion of the issue to the point that the issue will never be truly put to the test of a vote (Peshkin, 1982). This data will allow boards to determine if there is a chance for reorganization beyond the immediate opposition.

Statement 10: If the facts clearly indicated that reorganization were the best option for education in our district, I would personally support it in my dealings with my friends and associates.

The data produced by this statement would indicate how much support the board of education could anticipate from the leadership of the community if the rationale for reorganization were sound. The success of any sweeping change like reorganization must have the support of a good number of influentials in any community (D'Antonio, 1961).

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study deals primarily with attitudes and perceptions about school district reorganization. In order to assess this highly subjective data, a numerical scale will be employed to organize the responses to the statements of the survey. Each respondent to the survey has five options to mark: SA for strongly

agree, A for agree, U for undecided, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree.

For the purpose of data collection, each response will be given a corresponding value: SA=5, A=4, U=3, D=2, and SD=1. After giving each response a number value, the following will be determined:

1. a mean response for all influentials for each of the ten statements in the survey.
2. a frequency and percentage distribution for each community's influentials.

Frequency will indicate the number of responses in a certain category, such as strongly agree. Percentage will indicate the proportion of the category responses as compared to the total responses to each statement. The researcher will be analyzing and displaying the observed results of this survey.

Chapter IV

Results

This study involved the surveying of four school districts to determine the current attitudes toward school district reorganization of influential citizens of each district. The influentials were selected through interviews with the superintendents of each district. In each district, ten influentials were identified from each of the following groups: farmers, businesspeople, teachers, professionals, and those considered influential for political or economic reasons.

Fifty survey instruments were sent to influentials in Tuscola, Atwood/Hammond, Arcola, and Villa Grove school districts. The mean score for each statement on the instrument was determined for each school district (see Table 1). Of the total of 200 instruments, 136 (68%) were returned. Frequency of response and percentage of response for each statement on the instrument were determined for each school district (see Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5).

Statement 1

Statement 1 addressed the feeling of inevitability of reorganization. Although all districts indicated a trend in attitudes which saw reorganization as inevitable, the district displaying the greatest attitude of inevitability was Tuscola (3.94) with Villa Grove (3.03) showing the least (see Table 1). A difference in the means of 0.91 between

Tuscola and Villa Grove indicated that Villa Grove viewed reorganization with less inevitability. Arcola (3.19) was not observably different from Villa Grove in its score, a difference of 0.16. Tuscola and Atwood/Hammond (3.71) both fell within the agree range. Arcola and Villa Grove fell within the uncertain range.

Table 1

Comparison of the Means

Question	Tuscola	Arcola	Atwood	VG
1	3.94	3.19	3.71	3.03
2	3.15	3.75	3.88	2.75
3	3.35	2.89	3.59	2.78
4	3.21	2.58	3.29	2.34
5	3.38	2.36	3.85	2.55
6	2.88	2.17	2.76	2.44
7	1.91	1.47	2.24	1.66
8	2.47	1.75	2.26	2.65
9	3.53	3.15	2.47	3.57
10	4.21	3.64	3.89	4.00

Statement 2

Statement 2 was a positive statement indicating that schools in their immediate area are quite similar and comparable. Arcola and Atwood/Hammond were the most positive toward this statement. The Atwood/Hammond mean of

3.88 and Arcola mean of 3.75 both fell within the agree range. However, Villa Grove was uncertain in their response with a score of 2.75 as was Tuscola with a mean of 3.15. The difference between the most positive, Atwood/Hammond, and the most negative, Villa Grove, was 1.13.

Statement 3

Statement 3 stated that the reorganization of their school district into a somewhat larger district would improve educational opportunity for the students of their district. Atwood/Hammond was the most positive district with a score of 3.59. Tuscola was second with a score of 3.35. Arcola was uncertain towards this statement with a score of 2.89, and Villa Grove was the most negative with a score of 2.78. Again the range fell between Atwood/Hammond and Villa Grove with a difference of 0.81. Tuscola, Arcola, and Villa Grove fell within the uncertain range in regard to the advantages of a larger school district.

Statement 4

Statement 4 stated that the people of the district would get more for their money if they combined with another district or districts. All the districts fell within the uncertain range except Villa Grove which scored in the disagree range. Atwood/Hammond was the most positive district with a score of 3.29; however, Tuscola was almost the same with a score of 3.21. Arcola's score of 2.58 was only 0.24 above Villa Grove's score of 2.34.

Statement 5

Statement 5 dealt with the concept of conversion of unit school districts into dual districts. Although not possible at the present time without the involvement of a high school district, the concept is a viable possibility in the future. Respondents were asked to respond to a statement which proposed that if it were between raising taxes and reorganization, they would prefer to reorganize if they kept local control of their elementary school (K-8) but combined their high school with a neighboring high school or high schools.

Atwood/Hammond agreed with a score of 3.85. Tuscola's score of 3.38, and Villa Grove's score of 2.55 were both in the uncertain range. Arcola disagreed with the statement with a score of 2.36.

Statement 6

Statement 6 presented a similar statement to statement 5; however, rather than retaining control of the elementary school, the statement proposed consolidating the entire district with another district or districts. Tuscola, at 2.88, and Atwood/Hammond, with 2.76, were in the uncertain range. Villa Grove with a mean of 2.44 and Arcola, with a mean of 2.17, were in the disagree range.

Statement 7

Statement 7 presented the situation in which reorganization occurs and the respondents' district did not

retain a school in their community. They were to respond to the proposition that the loss of the school would not do significant harm to their local businesses.

All mean scores fell in the disagree and strongly disagree ranges. Atwood/Hammond's mean of 2.24, Tuscola's mean of 1.91, and Villa Grove mean of 1.66 were in the disagree range. Arcola, with a mean score of 1.47, was in the top of the strongly disagree range.

Statement 8

Statement 8 aimed at the idea that a larger consolidated school system would produce a wider known identity and that their community would gain greater benefit, either politically or economically, than they presently enjoy from their smaller school system. Again, all means for the school districts fell below the 3.00 level. Villa Grove was near the bottom of the uncertain range with a mean score of 2.65. Tuscola's mean was 2.47, Atwood/Hammond's mean score was 2.26, and Arcola mean score of 1.75 were all in the disagree range.

Statement 9

Statement 9 attempted to determine the influentials' attitude toward the open-mindedness of their fellow community members toward reorganization. The statement proposed that if the local board of education saw reorganization as the best option for the school district, most citizens in the community would listen to the reasons

and make the best choice for the education of the students. Villa Grove and Tuscola, both in the agreed range, were very close in their mean scores with 3.57 and 3.53 respectively. Arcola was in the uncertain range with a mean score of 3.15. However, Atwood/Hammond with a mean score of 2.47 fell within the disagree range. On the statement of open-mindedness there was a range of 1.10 in the mean scores.

Statement 10

Statement 10 sought to find the level to which the influentials would take a stand on reorganization if the question were to be presented in their district, and the facts clearly indicated that reorganization was the best option for the district. Would they personally support it in their dealings with friends and associates.

All mean scores were well above the 3.00 level. Tuscola's mean score of 4.21, Villa Grove's mean score of 4.00, Atwood/Hammond's mean score of 3.89, and Arcola's mean score of 3.64 all fell within the agree range. There was only a range of 0.57 in the means for this statement.

Requests for Information

At the end of the instrument, respondents were given the opportunity to receive a summary of the results of this survey on reorganization. To do so, they had to identify themselves by name. Villa Grove had the most respondents wanting results with 69% requesting the summary.

Atwood/Hammond had 41%, and Arcola had 33%. Tuscola had the fewest requesting further information with 24% requesting the summary.

The following frequency and percentage tables were developed to illustrate the distribution of responses and will be sent as information to the respondents.

Table 2

Tuscola Survey Frequency and Percentage

Question	SA		A		U		D		SD		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	6	18	24	71	-	-	4	12	-	-	34
2.	2	6	16	47	4	12	9	27	3	9	34
3.	4	12	14	41	6	18	10	29	-	-	34
4.	2	6	14	41	8	24	9	27	1	3	34
5.	3	9	21	62	-	-	6	18	4	12	34
6.	2	6	12	35	4	12	12	35	4	12	34
7.	2	6	-	-	4	12	15	44	13	38	34
8.	-	-	4	12	10	29	18	53	2	6	34
9.	2	6	22	65	2	6	8	24	-	-	34
10.	11	32	19	56	4	12	-	-	-	-	34

f = frequency of response

% = percentage of the response for that question

N = number of responses

Table 3

Atwood/Hammond Survey Frequency and Percentage

Question	SA		A		U		D		SD		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	4	12	24	71	-	-	4	12	2	6	34
2.	2	6	28	82	2	6	2	6	-	-	34
3.	10	29	10	29	6	18	6	18	2	6	34
4.	6	18	8	24	10	29	10	29	-	-	34
5.	7	21	21	62	2	6	2	6	2	6	34
6.	4	12	8	24	4	12	12	35	6	18	34
7.	4	12	4	12	2	6	10	29	14	41	34
8.	4	12	1	3	7	21	10	29	12	35	34
9.	-	-	7	21	7	21	15	44	5	15	34
10.	6	18	22	65	2	6	4	12	-	-	34

f = frequency of response

% = percentage of the response for that question

N = number of responses

Table 4

Arcola Survey Frequency and Percentage

Question	SA		A		U		D		SD		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	3	8	17	47	6	17	4	11	6	17	36
2.	2	6	28	78	1	3	5	14	-	-	36
3.	4	11	10	28	4	11	14	39	4	11	36
4.	2	6	8	22	5	14	15	42	6	17	36
5.	1	3	9	25	4	11	10	28	12	33	36
6.	1	3	3	8	9	25	11	31	12	33	36
7.	2	6	-	-	1	3	7	19	26	72	36
8.	-	-	1	3	5	14	14	39	16	44	36
9.	2	6	16	47	4	12	9	26	3	9	34
10.	3	8	21	58	8	22	4	11	-	-	36

f = frequency of response

% = percentage of the response for that question

N = number of responses

Table 5

Villa Grove Survey Frequency and Percentage

Question	SA		A		U		D		SD		N
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1.	4	13	10	31	2	6	15	47	1	3	32
2.	2	6	12	38	-	-	12	38	6	19	32
3.	5	16	3	9	8	25	12	38	4	13	32
4.	2	6	4	13	6	19	11	34	9	28	32
5.	-	-	10	32	3	10	12	39	6	19	31
6.	-	-	10	31	2	6	12	38	8	25	32
7.	4	13	-	-	-	-	5	16	23	72	32
8.	1	3	7	23	5	16	16	52	2	6	31
9.	4	13	19	63	1	3	2	7	4	13	30
10.	8	27	14	47	8	27	-	-	-	-	30

f = frequency of response

% = percentage of the response for that question

N = number of responses

Chapter V

Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The first goal of this study was to develop a model for determining the current attitudes toward school district reorganization. This model was to be designed in such a way that the discussion of reorganization would be separate from an open public forum yet give a true reading of attitudes to decision makers in local education. By a review of the literature and research, three objectives were met. They were:

1. identify groups of influential citizens from whom data could be gathered to detect trends and attitudes toward areas of concern about reorganization.
2. discover areas of common concern and disagreement in the reorganization discussion.
3. formulate these points of concern and disagreement into a survey instrument which is direct and to the point.

The second goal of the study was to apply this model to several school districts. After the development of the model, three objectives were met. They were:

1. to identify influentials in Tuscola, Arcola, Atwood/Hammond, and Villa Grove school districts.
2. to distribute the survey instrument to the identified influentials with the cooperation of each school district administration.

3. to collect and descriptively analyze the data to display the current attitudes toward reorganization in the studied school districts.

Findings

The survey instrument was distributed to influentials in Tuscola, Arcola, Atwood/Hammond, and Villa Grove school districts. Of those distributed, 136 surveys were returned to the unit offices of each school district. The survey was designed to determine the current attitudes toward school district reorganization in each school district.

On the question of the inevitability of reorganization, each district had a mean score above 3.00; however, both Tuscola and Atwood/Hammond, with means of 3.94 and 3.71 respectively, appear to see the inevitability of reorganization more readily than Arcola or Villa Grove. Arcola and Villa Grove, with respective mean score of 3.19 and 3.03, see reorganization as uncertain. When asked about the compatibility of schools in their immediate area, Arcola and Atwood/Hammond saw neighboring school districts as being comparable and similar to a greater degree than both Tuscola and Villa Grove.

When asked if reorganization into a larger school district would improve educational opportunity, Atwood/Hammond agreed while Arcola, Villa Grove, and Tuscola were uncertain. When the respondents reacted to the statement that they would get more for their money if their

district were reorganized, all responded in the uncertain range except Villa Grove which disagreed. Again, Atwood/Hammond was the most positive followed closely by Tuscola.

When considering the type of reorganization, conversion, in which the control of the local elementary school is retained, was perceived as more acceptable over the consolidation of the entire school district by all the schools in the survey. However, none of the four districts felt that reorganization into a larger school district would benefit their communities with a wider known identity.

The most obvious concern of the influentials was the effect that reorganization would have on the local businesses. Inherent to reorganization is the eventual closing of school buildings. In all cases the respondents felt that the failure to retain a school in the community would do significant harm to local business.

Respondents in all districts agreed when asked if they would actively support reorganization if the facts clearly indicated that reorganization was the best option for education locally. However, when asked if their fellow community members would listen to the discussion of reorganization with an open mind, Atwood/Hammond influentials disagreed. The Tuscola and Villa Grove agreed that the citizens would listen with an open mind while Arcola influentials were uncertain.

Conclusions

The study was able to meet the goals and objectives set for it, but the degree to which attitudinal data is viable in the changing political and economic status of school districts will vary. In the studied groups, both Tuscola and Atwood/Hammond were more positively oriented toward reorganization than Arcola and Villa Grove. Tuscola, being centrally located in an array of small school districts, appears confident that its facilities and the fact that it is the political seat of the area will make it the benefactor of any reorganization plan. Atwood/Hammond, struggling to overcome financial problems, has had open discussions of reorganization as a way to achieve their goal of a more effective and efficient school system. Because of this discussion, whether fruitful or not, school reorganization will be a ready possibility for any future school troubles in Atwood/Hammond.

Both Arcola and Villa Grove are viable communities with school systems that are respected in the community. When either community considers reorganization, it will have to see itself as the benefactor of such a plan or be in such a poor educational situation that no other options are available. Both communities have significant business activity which would be threatened by any change in school organization as long as Tuscola is part of the scheme. However, Tuscola would have to be a part of any meaningful

reorganization plan in the area of these schools.

Recommendations

To sell the idea of reorganization, the concept of regional cooperation and benefit would have to be developed. It would have to be seen that business, property values, and the general regional economy could benefit from the development of a more unified Douglas County. Unifying the schools must be seen as the first step in developing the county, rather than the parts of the county, for the benefit of all. However, it is more likely that other joint business development must take place first.

To determine the viability of reorganization, local research must be done on a timely basis. Areas of concern must be identified, and as Dunne (1977) and Peshkin (1982) point out, local public relations must be developed to deal with these concerns before any successful public forums can be held on the question of reorganization.

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Appendix

The following survey is the instrument developed to gather data on attitudes toward reorganization.

Survey on Reorganization

Eastern Illinois University

Listed below are ten statements about school district reorganization. Please apply the statements to your local school district and respond by circling how you feel about the statement.

SA = Strongly Agree
Undecided

A = Agree

U =

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

1. It is only a matter of time before our school district will combine with another school district in some sort of reorganization.

SA A U D SD

2. The school districts in our immediate area are quite similar and comparable.

SA A U D SD

3. The reorganization of my school district into a somewhat larger district would improve educational opportunity for our students.

SA A U D SD

4. We would get more for our money if we combined with another district or districts.

SA A U D SD

5. If the choice were between raising taxes and reorganization, I would support reorganization if we kept local control of our elementary school (K-8) but combined our high school with a neighboring high school or high schools.

SA A U D SD

6. If the choice were between raising taxes to keep our school and consolidation, I would support the reorganization of our entire district with another district or districts.

SA A U D SD

7. If through reorganization our community did not retain a school, the loss of the school would not do significant harm to our local businesses.

SA A U D SD

8. Our town would gain as much benefit and a wider known identity from a consolidated school system than it presently gets from our smaller school system.

SA A U D SD

9. If reorganization were seen as the best option for our school district by the Board of Education, some would oppose it; but most would listen to the reasons and make the best choice for the education of our students.

SA A U D SD

10. If the facts clearly indicated that reorganization were the best option for education in our district, I would personally support it in my dealings with my friends and associates.

SA A U D SD

Thank you for your contribution to this study. Please return this survey in the addressed envelope as soon as possible.

If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please print your name on the following line.
